

United States Marine Corps  
Command and Staff College  
Marine Corps University  
2076 South Street  
Marine Corps Combat Development Command  
Quantico, Virginia 22134-5068

MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

---

**TITLE:**

The Combat Role of African American Marines during  
World War II: An Answer to the Spike Lee – Clint Eastwood Debate

**AUTHOR:**

Major Derrick L. Jones, United States Marine Corps

AY 08-09

---

Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: Donald F. Bittner, Ph.D. Prof. of History

Approved: Donald F. Bittner, Ph.D.

Date: 21 March 2009

Oral Defense Committee Member: David W. Major LTC FACAD

Approved: David W. Major

Date: 21 MAR 09

J.W. Gordon  
Reviewed  
20 Mar 09

| Report Documentation Page  |                                    |                                     |   | Form Approved<br>OMB No. 0704-0188                  |                                 |
|--|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---|---------------------------------|
| Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. |                                    |                                     |   |   |                                 |
| 1. REPORT DATE<br><b>2009</b>  |                                    | 2. REPORT TYPE                      |   | 3. DATES COVERED<br><b>00-00-2009 to 00-00-2009</b> |                                 |
| 4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE<br><b>The Combat Role of African American Marines during World War II: An Answer to the Spike Lee - Clint Eastwood Debate</b>  |                                    |                                     |   | 5a. CONTRACT NUMBER                                 |                                 |
|  |                                    |                                     |   | 5b. GRANT NUMBER                                    |                                 |
|  |                                    |                                     |   | 5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER                          |                                 |
| 6. AUTHOR(S)   |                                    |                                     |   | 5d. PROJECT NUMBER                                  |                                 |
|  |                                    |                                     |   | 5e. TASK NUMBER                                     |                                 |
|  |                                    |                                     |   | 5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER                                |                                 |
| 7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)<br><b>United States Marine Corps, School of Advanced Warfighting, Marine Corps University, 2076 South Street, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Quantico, VA, 22134-5068</b>   |                                    |                                     |   | 8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER            |                                 |
| 9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)  |                                    |                                     |   | 10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)                    |                                 |
|  |                                    |                                     |   | 11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)              |                                 |
| 12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT<br><b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>  |                                    |                                     |   |   |                                 |
| 13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES  |                                    |                                     |   |   |                                 |
| 14. ABSTRACT   |                                    |                                     |   |   |                                 |
| 15. SUBJECT TERMS  |                                    |                                     |   |   |                                 |
| 16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:  |                                    |                                     | 17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT<br><b>Same as Report (SAR)</b> | 18. NUMBER OF PAGES<br><b>41</b>                    | 19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON |
| a. REPORT<br><b>unclassified</b>   | b. ABSTRACT<br><b>unclassified</b> | c. THIS PAGE<br><b>unclassified</b> |   |   |                                 |

#### DISCLAIMER

THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF EITHER THE MARINE CORPS COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.

QUOTATION FROM, ABSTRACTION FROM, OR REPRODUCTION OF ALL OR ANY PART OF THIS DOCUMENT IS PERMITTED PROVIDED PROPER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT IS MADE.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Title:** The Combat Role of African American Marines during World War II: An Answer to the Spike Lee – Clint Eastwood Debate

**Author:** Major Derrick L. Jones, United States Marine Corps

**Thesis:** The Marine Corps played a decisive role in allowing the United States to achieve its strategic objectives in the Pacific during World War II. These objectives may not have been realized if it were not for the contributions of African American Marines who served bravely in the Pacific Theater of Operations.

**Discussion:** United States Marines, a significant part of General Douglas Macarthur and Admiral Chester Nimitz's island hopping campaigns in the Pacific, enabled Allied powers to capture airbases on islands previously held by Japanese forces. The capture of these islands advanced Allied forces closer to Japan and threatened the invasion of the home islands. Success of the island hopping campaigns, coupled with the use of the two atomic bombs on mainland Japan, forced the Japanese to capitulate. However, the contributions of African American Marines during WWII are often overlooked.

In 1942, as a result of Executive Order Number 8802, the U.S. Marines started enlisting African American Marines. By the end of WWII 19,168 African American males became Marines, 12,738 of whom served overseas in the Pacific during the war. The first African American Marines sent to the Pacific were assigned to racially segregated and self-sustaining units called defense battalions. Two such units were created, the 51<sup>st</sup> and the 52<sup>nd</sup> Defense Battalions. Their mission was overseas base defense. Later during the war, as the U.S. gained domination of the Pacific, the need for defense battalions declined while the need for unique logistical units to move supplies to forward staging areas increased. This led to the creation of ammunition and depot companies composed by African Americans. These were small units, which performed logistic functions. The Marine Corps ultimately created 51 depot companies and 12 ammunition companies to support amphibious operations in the Pacific.

Significant contributions to winning the island hopping campaigns of WWII came from African American Marine depot and ammunition companies. These units performed the duties of physical logistics: manhandling, sorting, building/defending supply dumps, and delivering essential supplies such as food, water, and ammunition to the front line Marines engaged with the enemy. These duties were crucial to winning the battles on Saipan, Tinian, Guam, Peleliu, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa.

**Conclusion:** African American Marines served where ordered and their duty although not well known, was significant in the island hopping advance towards Japan. Without these units comprised of African American Marines, the Corps would have had more difficulty in achieving victory in the Pacific. Their logistic functions were critical to the success of key amphibious operations.

## Table of Contents

|   | Page |
|---|------|
| Disclaimer  | i    |
| Executive Summary   | ii   |
| Preface   | iv   |
| Private First Class Luther Woodward Photo                           | vi   |
| Introduction  | 1    |
| Background  | 2    |
| Training  | 4    |
| African American Units  | 7    |
| Battles Supported by the Ammunition and Depot Companies             | 14   |
| Awards  | 19   |
| Conclusion  | 20   |
| Clint Eastwood – Spike Lee Debate                                   | 21   |
| Endnotes  | 22   |
| Bibliography  | 27   |
| Appendix A Chronology   | 28   |
| Appendix B PFC Luther Woodward Award Citation                       | 29   |
| Appendix C Colonel Samuel A. Woods Biography                        | 30   |
| Appendix D Sergeant Major Gilbert Johnson Biography                 | 31   |
| Appendix E Defense Battalions 1942-1946                             | 32   |
| Appendix F African American Units, World War II                     | 33   |
| Appendix G African American Marine Units Involved in Major WWII Ops | 34   |

## *Preface*

While attending the U.S. Marine Corps' Command and Staff College, one of my professors (Dr. Donald F. Bittner) and I engaged in a conversation surrounding a comment that movie director Spike Lee made to Clint Eastwood at the Cannes Film Festival in May 2008. Lee addressed the absence of black actors on the screen in the film "Flags of Our Fathers," which Eastwood directed. The Professor and I discussed whether the accusation by Lee was justified or unfounded. I began to wonder what role, if any, did African-American Marines play in World War II.

Alex Altman of Time magazine wrote an article on the subject entitled *Debating on Iwo Jima*. The article quotes Lee in saying that "Clint Eastwood made two films about Iwo Jima that ran for more than four hours total, and there was not one Negro actor on the screen." The article also quoted Lee's comments from the Cannes Film Festival as, "In his version of Iwo Jima, negro soldiers did not exist." Altman added that, "Lee has claimed that by soft peddling the role of African Americans in the battle, Eastwood has whitewashed history."<sup>1</sup> However, Clint Eastwood defends himself by stating, "African American soldiers didn't raise the flag. If I go ahead and put an African-American actor in there, people'd go, this guy's lost his mind."

My paper examines the contributions of African American Marines during World War II through a compilation of numerous primary and secondary sources, such as books, articles, movies, documentaries, and Marine Corps archives. I have two reasons for writing this paper. First: To determine if there was any merit to Spike Lee's accusations that Clint Eastwood was not accurately portraying history by omitting blacks in his two

---

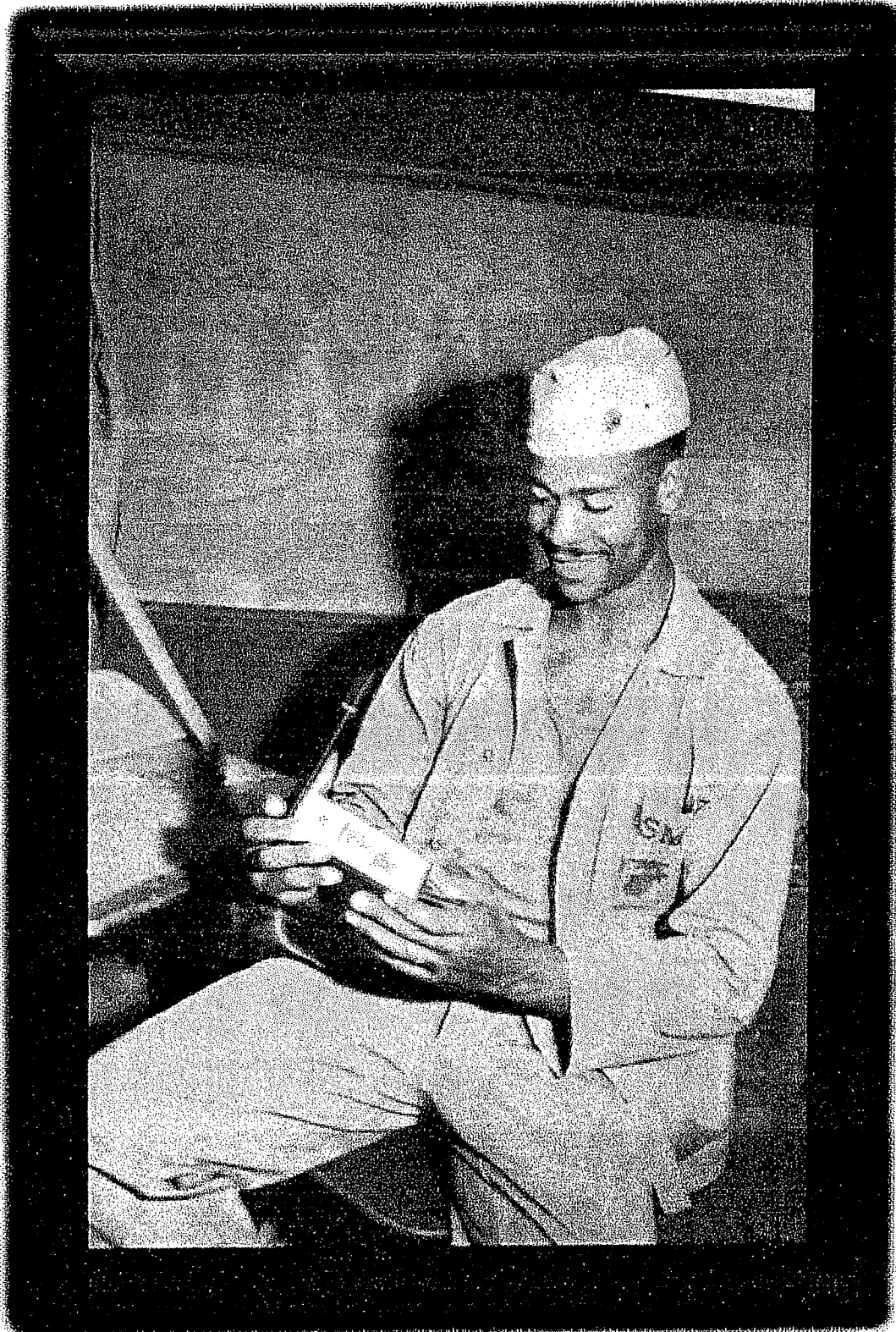
<sup>1</sup> Alex Altman 2008, "Debating on Iwo Jima," Time Magazine, June 12, <http://www.time.com/> (accessed October 20, 2008).

films about Iwo Jima. Second: The contributions of African American Marines during the Second World War are not well known throughout the Marine Corps, or the world.

In researching this topic, my detailed analysis of primary and secondary sources uncovered several disturbing accounts of racist views and bigoted comments from senior leaders serving during the war within the Department of the Navy. I have intentionally omitted these accounts because they detract from the topic and truly should be left in the past. The views of military leaders serving during that conflict only reflect the ideals of American society at the time; nothing more, nothing less. Highlighting the shortcomings of previous leaders has no purpose in this paper.

It should be pointed out that, as far as this author is concerned, Marines are not separated by race, color, creed, religion, age, national origin or gender. The distinction of being called a United States Marine applies to all who have through Parris Island, San Diego, Quantico, or in the case of this paper, Montford Point. There is no need for any further distinction. However, I use the terms black, white, colored, African American, and Caucasian throughout the article. This is not intended to offend anyone, but distinction in color is used only as descriptive adjectives for clarity and understanding.

Lastly, I would like to thank mentor, "Doc" Bittner, for constantly providing wisdom, direction, and ensuring that I remained committed to completion of my goals. I would like to thank faculty advisor Lieutenant Colonel David Major for providing knowledge and leadership throughout this academic year. Lastly, I would like to thank my wife, Tish, who will not acknowledge the word quit, nor will she give up on anything. Her love, guidance, and assistance made this paper possible.



PFC Luther Woodward of 4<sup>th</sup> Ammunition Company received the highest award of an African American Marine during World War II. Originally a Bronze Star Medal, it was later upgraded to a Silver Star Medal. (see Appendix B)



## Introduction

*Because of their renowned performance in storming beaches during World War II on islands such as Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Okinawa, and, above all, Iwo Jima, the Marines are known as shock troops - meaning they are highly spirited and aggressive soldiers trained to storm enemy defenses along a stretch of shoreline, secure a beachhead, and clear the way for heavier, conventional forces to follow. Yet, they are a great deal more than that too. The Marines are highly flexible and adaptable soldiers-among the world's most versatile and spirited.*<sup>1</sup>

- - James A. Warren, *American Spartans* (2005), p.5

The Marine Corps played a decisive role in allowing the United States to achieve its strategic objectives in the Pacific during World War II (WWII). The Corps, a significant part of General Douglas MacArthur and Admiral Chester W. Nimitz's island hopping campaigns in the South and Central Pacific enabled the United States to seize areas previously held by Japanese forces on which airfields were built. Capturing these areas enabled U.S. Forces to bomb the mainland and threaten a land invasion of Japan. This, in addition to the use of two atomic bombs dropped at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, forced the Japanese to capitulate. However, these objectives would not have been realized if it were not for the contributions of African American Marines who served bravely in the Pacific Theater of Operations.

While the United States was involved with World War II, over 1,154,700 million African Americans served in the United States armed forces.<sup>1</sup> Of this number, some 19,168 black men served in the Corps during the war.<sup>2</sup> African American black men constituted 7.7 percent of total military personnel in the war and 3.7 percent of Marine Corps personnel.<sup>3</sup> Of the African American Marines serving in the war, some 8,000 of the troops braved Japanese fire on Pacific beachheads.<sup>4</sup>

This paper will examine the background, training, units, and battles supported by African

---

<sup>1</sup> James A. Warren, *American Spartans: The U.S. Marines: A Combat History From Iwo Jima to Iraq* (New York: Free Press, 2005), 5

American Marines during the Second World War. Thus providing context for the events leading up to the creation of African American units in the Marine Corps, and to show the factors that shaped the organization of these units. In the end, the reader will gain a better understanding of the contributions African American personnel made to the successes of the Marine Corps during the island hopping campaigns in the Pacific. Also, there will be closure to the debate between directors Clint Eastwood and Spike Lee referred to in the Preface of this paper.

### **Background**

During the Revolutionary War, an estimated 5,000 blacks, free men and slaves, helped fight the British for America's independence. Some of these blacks served in the Continental Marines. The 1783 Treaty of Paris ended the Revolutionary War. As the last war ships were sold off, the Continental Navy and Continental Marines were disbanded. In 1798, tensions between the United States and France led to the decision to build new ships and re-establish the United States Navy and United States Marine Corps. When the time came to recruit crews for the new warships, the U.S. Navy banned "Negroes or Mulattoes," grouping them with "Persons whose Characters are Suspicious." The Commandant of the re-established Marine Corps, Lieutenant Colonel William Ward Burrows, followed suit and barred African Americans from enlisting in the Marine Corps just as the Navy had done.<sup>5</sup> This policy to exclude African Americans from enlisting in the Marine Corps lasted for over 140 years.

When the Germans invaded Poland in 1939, the U.S. Marine Corps, unlike the U.S. Army, the U.S. Army Air Corps, and U.S. Navy, did not allow African Americans to enter its ranks. Prior to 1941, the U.S. Army possessed the majority of the military's African Americans, with blacks represented in every one of the Army's combat, support and service arms, including limited numbers in the U.S. Army Air Corps.<sup>6</sup> The U.S. Navy also allowed African

Americans to enlist, but the black sailors were only allowed to serve in the mess (Navy kitchens).<sup>7</sup> The Marine Corps was the only branch of the armed forces that maintained a strict policy of exclusion of African Americans from enlisting.

By law, the Marine Corps is and was a component of the Department of the Navy, with its Commandant subordinate to the Secretary of the Navy in matters concerning manpower and the budget. From 7 December 1933, the Fleet Marine Force came under the operational control for planning and operations, of the Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet.<sup>8</sup> In the conduct of ordinary business, however, the Commandant was independent of the Navy. More to the point, the Marine Corps was independent of the Bureau of Naval Personnel. The Corps possessed its own Division of Plans and Policies, which was directly subordinate to the Commandant for manpower planning. Therefore, the Marine Corps set its own racial policies independent of the Navy.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the Marine Corps was forced to change its policy regarding enlisting African Americans because of an Executive Order signed prior to the United States officially entering the Second World War.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt, seeking his third presidential election in November 1940, offered African Americans better treatment and greater opportunity in the segregated armed services in return for their possible support in the 1940 election. On 25 June 1941, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order Number 8802, "banning racial discrimination in hiring by defense industries under contract to the federal government and establishing the Fair Employment Practices Commission to monitor compliance."<sup>10</sup> President Roosevelt directed that "all departments of the government, including the Armed Forces, shall lead the way in erasing discrimination over color or race."<sup>11</sup> Under these directives, the Marine Corps was forced to recruit and permit African Americans to serve in its ranks.

The Secretary of the Navy, Frank Knox, advised the uniformed leaders of the Navy and

Marine Corps on 7 April 1942 that they would have to accept African Americans for general service. On 25 May 1942, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Lieutenant General Thomas Holcomb, issued formal instructions to begin recruiting qualified, "colored male citizens of the United States between the ages of 17 and 29, inclusive, for service in a combat organization." This recruiting began on 1 June of that year. However, due to the nature of American society in 1942, the African Americans recruited in the Marine Corps during the Second World War were racially segregated.<sup>12</sup> Desegregation of the United States Military would not occur until July 1948, when President Harry S. Truman signed Executive Order Number 9981; that declared a policy of "equal treatment and opportunity" in the military services.<sup>13</sup>

### **Training**

African American would receive their training at Montford Point, North Carolina. This area covered over five square miles and was located on a finger of land protruding into the New River. Surrounded by thick pine forests, Wilson Bay, New River, and Scales Creek, its isolation satisfied the segregation requirements sought by the Marine Corps. The Camp, located to the east of Jacksonville, North Carolina, had already been constructed and in use prior to the start of World War II and the arrival of African American recruits.<sup>14</sup>

Excluding the white leaders, Montford Point was an all black, racially segregated, boot camp and basic training facility.<sup>15</sup> It trained African American Marines from the point of indoctrination through completions of military occupational specialties. Boot camp training was a near exact replica of Parris Island or San Diego Recruit Depots, ensuring that Montford Point Marines had ethos and discipline equal to that of any other Marine. In addition to recruit training, Montford Point organized training for African American Marines in occupational specialty areas needed to support and operate an independent Marine battalion; the question would be, what type of unit would be created?

The leadership of the Marine Corps made a decision prior to enlisting any African Americans: its segregated units would not be placed in insignificant, garrison-type duties. The African American units would be directly involved in combat and contribute to winning battles. In this sense, they would be just as all other deployable Marine units.<sup>16</sup> The initial vehicle for establishing segregated units in the Marine Corps was to create a composite defense battalion of approximately 900 African American Marines. A composite defense battalion was a unit containing seacoast artillery, antiaircraft artillery, a rifle company, a light tank platoon, and other weapons units or components necessary to make the battalion a self-sustaining outfit.<sup>17</sup> The overall task of this type of unit was overseas base defense.<sup>18</sup> Defense Battalions, created by the Marine Corps, solved the problems associated with placing garrisons on the smaller overseas possessions of the Navy and Marine Corps. Most of these possessions were airbases. Defending naval aviation assets, such as airbases, allowed to the United States to project its military power toward Japan.<sup>19</sup>

The creation of a composite defense battalion of African American Marines was Montford Point's initial ultimate objective. On 18 August 1942, Headquarters & Service (H&S) Battery of the 51<sup>st</sup> Composite Defense Battalion was activated at Montford Point. This command became responsible for recruit training, military specialty training and support functions associated with running the camp. Colonel Samuel A. Woods commanded the 51<sup>st</sup> Battalion, which included H&S Battery and Camp Montford Point. Colonel Woods, a graduate of the Citadel, earned the respect of his troops through his calmness and fairness. He cultivated a paternalistic relationship with his Marines, which earned him the nickname "The Great White Father."<sup>20</sup> (see Appendix C) Colonel Woods' Battalion Executive Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Theodore A. Holdahl, was in charge of recruit training at Montford Point. When the 51<sup>st</sup> Battalion was activated in August 1942, the staff consisted of 23 officers and 90 enlisted

men.<sup>21</sup>

On 26 August 1942, the first contingent of African American recruits began training at Montford Point.<sup>22</sup> The camp possessed all Caucasian officers, and, initially, all Caucasian Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) led all Montford Point training. The officers and NCOs were from the south, primarily because of a then belief that southerners had more experience dealing with African Americans and were therefore better suited for the job. What is important to note is that the personnel selected to train the Montford Point recruits were "old line" or high caliber Marines, extremely disciplined NCOs who were, "to impress the recruits with their bearing and firmness of matter."<sup>23</sup> According to Gilbert H. "Hashmark" Johnson (Montford Point Recruit), the discipline that these drill instructors instilled was, "very much to our later benefit."<sup>24</sup> (see Appendix D) It is also important to note that the Marine Corps was looking for the "best" applicants from African American society. They wanted intelligent and educated personnel. Some recruits came in with college degrees. "Outside of the Tuskegee Airmen, we probably had the most diversified, best-educated troops in the country."<sup>25</sup> The result was a cadre of Montford Point Marines who were disciplined, professional, and well prepared to fight.

However, the Marine Corps still needed competent African American non-commissioned officers to lead the Battalion. Eventually, the Corps got the leadership it desired from recruits with prior service in the Army and Navy, or exceptional recruits, who were singled out to be "Acting Jacks," i.e. assistant Drill Instructors in their own platoons. This came about due to a shortage of Caucasian NCOs and because one of the purposes of training at Montford Point was to, "discover and develop potential black NCOs."<sup>26</sup>

The Marines from Montford Point wanted to impress their Caucasian counterparts, so exhibiting strong Marine Corps ethos and discipline evolved due to desire, hard work, and

standards. Obie Hall (Montford Point Marine) recalled, "The men of Montford Point tried to look their sharpest, especially when in the presence of white Marines. They really put their chest out."<sup>27</sup> Corporal Elmer N. Bowen (One of the first Montford Point Drill Instructors) also recalled that, Montford Point recruits, trainees, and staff had to look sharp and stay professional because they, "never knew when Eleanor Roosevelt or a congressman or senator would show up for an inspection to see how the colored Marines were progressing."<sup>28</sup> Montford Point recruits were intelligent and disciplined Marines, trained by some of the best NCOs in the Corps, with a desire to prove themselves to their counterparts and the world.

Near the end of November 1942, the first 198 African American Marine recruits were nearing completion of their eight-week boot camp. Their last week was live fire training at the Camp Lejeune rifle range, where they shot well and achieved the last right of passage to becoming a United States Marine. After the graduation of the first Montford Point Marines, the 51<sup>st</sup> Composite Defense Battalion formed.<sup>29</sup> In the month of December 1942, a rifle company (reinforced), a 155mm gun battery, a 90mm antiaircraft group, and a 75mm pack howitzer battery were formed under the 51<sup>st</sup> Composite Defense Battalion. In addition, the first African American Marine Drill Instructors came out of this graduating class.

### **African American Units**

With the reality that African Americans were coming into the Marine Corps, one proposal was to organize a black raider battalion. However, the director of plans and policies dismissed the proposal.<sup>30</sup> The solution instead was to organize a Composite Defense Battalion in order to keep African Americans segregated from the rest of the Marine Corps. The creation of a single defense battalion, however, would prove to be insufficient to accommodate the large numbers of African Americans entering the Marine Corps the following year.

In December 1942, near the time the first Montford Point recruits graduated, voluntary

enlistments in the Armed Forces were discontinued for males 18 to 37 years of age. Starting in January 1943, all men in the before-mentioned age bracket would be inducted into the services through the Selective Service System (Draft System). The stipulations of the Selective Service System mandated that 10% of the personnel selected would be black, a proportion equal to the number of blacks in the U.S. population as a whole. Since the Marine Corps had been authorized a plus up of 99,000 men in that year, 9,900 of them had to be African Americans.<sup>31</sup>

The Marine Corps quickly realized that one composite defense battalion and its training base could not accommodate such a large influx of African American personnel. Thus, an immediate problem arose: what to do with the sudden influx of African Americans? The draft forced the Marine Corps to devise new jobs and units for its African American inductees. A plan circulated in the Division of Plans and Policies proposing more defense battalions, a branch of messmen, and the creation of large black units for local bases to serve as chauffeurs, messengers, clerks, and janitors. The leadership of the Marine Corps, however, decided not to go that route. An all black Steward's Branch was created, but the majority of African Americans would enter defense battalions, to the maximum extent possible. Each of the defense battalions could accommodate approximately 1000 African American Marines within its artillery, infantry, and armor detachments in segregated self-contained units. But, the number of these types of units was limited by the amount of African American NCOs available at the time.<sup>32</sup> The plan was to build several defense battalions to accommodate whatever African Americans were not filling Steward Branch billets.<sup>33</sup>

#### 51<sup>st</sup> (Composite) Defense Battalion

Defense battalions had already seen combat in the Pacific. The best known example is the 1<sup>st</sup> Defense Battalion gallant defense of Wake Island from invading Japanese; also, the 3<sup>rd</sup> and



6<sup>th</sup> Battalions engaging enemy ships and planes on Midway with seacoast defense and antiaircraft guns.<sup>34</sup> When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Lieutenant Colonel (LtCol) Floyd A. Stephenson, an experienced artillery officer, was present with the 4<sup>th</sup> Defense Battalion. In the spring of 1943, Stephenson became the new commanding officer of the 51<sup>st</sup> Defense Battalion.<sup>35</sup>

Interestingly, LtCol Stephenson was a native of Texas and a product of segregated society; however, he approached his new assignment with enthusiasm.<sup>36</sup> Inside two weeks from taking command, he was recommending that the 51<sup>st</sup> Defense Battalion “become a regular, Heavy Defense Battalion” and he stated, “that there is nothing that suitable colored personnel can not be taught.” Additionally, Colonel Woods, the Camp Headquarters Commander, was in agreement with Lieutenant Colonel Stephenson. The two senior ranking officers were convinced that the 51<sup>st</sup> Defense Battalion could “be forged into a first class fighting outfit in a reasonably short time after its complement is filled.”<sup>37</sup> The views of these two senior officers in the Marine Corps seem racist and biased by today’s standards, but at the time they demonstrated progressive attitudes toward African Americans by alluding that the personnel were on par with Caucasian Marines, albeit if segregated.

However, by the end of 1942, the role of defense battalions was changing in the Marine Corps. By then, they were defending against Japanese air strikes vice repulsing amphibious landings. As a result, a reorganization of the 51<sup>st</sup> Defense Battalion occurred in June 1943. On the Table of Organization (T/O) the Rifle Company (Reinforced), and the 75mm pack howitzer battery disappeared. The 51<sup>st</sup> was reorganized into three groups: an Antiaircraft Artillery Group, equipped with 90mm Guns; a Seacoast Artillery Group, equipped with 155mm guns; and a Special Weapons Group, equipped with 20mm and 40mm automatic cannons, and machine guns.<sup>38</sup> (see Appendix E)

With all the necessary training completed, the 51<sup>st</sup> Defense Battalion departed Montford Point in January 1944 and headed for the west coast by rail. The unit embarked aboard ship and sailed into the Pacific on 11 February 1944, in order to replace the 7<sup>th</sup> Defense Battalion located in the Ellice Islands. The 51<sup>st</sup> remained there for approximately six months, seeing almost no enemy action. On 8 September 1944, the 51<sup>st</sup> Defense Battalion departed the Ellice Islands by ship in route to the Marshall Islands. It was positioned ashore at Eniwetok Atoll in the Marshall Islands where the duty was "routine and relatively boring."<sup>39</sup>

While the 51<sup>st</sup> was in the Ellice Islands, it underwent yet another organizational change. This time the defense battalions reorganized on an antiaircraft basis, losing their 155mm guns, but gaining more 90mm for anti-air. The defense battalions also lost their machine guns and 20mm guns while receiving additional 40mm guns. Again, the change was in support of defeating Japanese aircraft. Nevertheless, African American Marines misunderstood the purpose for the reorganization. They widely believed that black troops were only going to serve as labor troops or officers' stewards in the Marine Corps, and these were the first steps in that process.<sup>40</sup> The 51<sup>st</sup> Defense Battalion sailed back to the United States in November 1945 and disbanded in 1946 at Montford Point.<sup>41</sup>

### 52<sup>nd</sup> Defense Battalion

The second African American segregated unit was the 52<sup>nd</sup> Defense Battalion. This battalion was organized on 15 December 1943. It trained for more than six months at Camp Montford Point before transferring in August 1944 to Camp Pendleton, California. On 21 September 1944, the 52<sup>nd</sup> Defense Battalion embarked aboard the USS Winged Arrow (AP-170) for the Marshall Islands, where the unit provided security for two Marine Air Groups on Majuro and Kwajalein Atolls for six months (October 1944 – March 1945). While in the Marshall Islands, the 52<sup>nd</sup> guarded Marine airstrips against Japanese air attacks and formed

reconnaissance parties tasked with searching for Japanese stragglers.<sup>42</sup>

On 4 May 1945, the 52<sup>nd</sup> Defense Battalion moved to the recaptured island of Guam and remained there for the remainder of the war. On Guam the 52<sup>nd</sup>, unlike the 51<sup>st</sup>, did see limited combat, but nothing significant. Guam had hundreds of armed Japanese soldiers still loose in the jungles hiding from Allied Forces. They were impotent as a combat force and not overly aggressive unless cornered, as these stragglers were mainly concerned with staying alive. However, patrols and ambushes from the 52<sup>nd</sup> encountered and killed a few Japanese soldiers during their time on Guam. It then, before returning home to the United States, relieved the 51<sup>st</sup> Defense Battalion at Kwajalein and Eniwetok in November 1945. The 52<sup>nd</sup> was on station, back at home in Montford Point, by May 1946.<sup>43</sup>

These two African American Marine defense battalions contributed to the island hopping campaign by defending operational assets in the Pacific. They were supporting the war effort, but the contributions by the two units originally established for combat operations had negligible impacts toward the success of the island hopping campaigns in the Pacific. The main explanation for the lack of combat is simply because of their assignment to isolated locations. These locations were removed from major combat operations by the time the African American defense battalions entered the theater. Nevertheless, the security duties they performed were important and deemed necessary; they did their duty.

Ironically, the main contributors to the success of the island hopping campaign in the Pacific were African American units that were not specifically designated as combat outfits. The African American defense battalions fired less than a dozen rounds at "what may have been a Japanese submarine," and saw sporadic action with surviving Japanese soldiers in Guam. But the ammunition and depot companies saw "savage fighting on the battlefields of Saipan, Tinian, Guam, Peleliu, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa."<sup>44</sup>

### Depot Companies and Ammunition Companies

James Ferguson, a Montford Point Marine, stated, "Black Marine depot companies fought beside white Marine assault units in what would become some of the most desperate and heroic fighting of the war. A depot company was like a utility company; it could be used in any capacity. Even in front line combat. When on the beachhead and they're dropping artillery and mortar rounds, that's about as much front line combat as you can get in."<sup>45</sup>

As the United States offensive in the Pacific gained momentum, the need for defense battalions declined simultaneously. The need for unique logistical units to move supplies to forward staging areas increased. The Fleet Marine Force (FMF) identified shortfalls in shore party (Marines that help facilitate landing and movement of troops, equipment, and supplies off the beach; and help evacuate casualties and enemy prisoners of war) operations before the war, and the problem "still plagued the Marine supply system."<sup>46</sup> Operations in the Pacific were reliant on ships to transport men and vast quantities of material around the theater, and on tactical battlefields. There was a critical "need for labor units, stevedores on docks, strong backs and brute force muscle in the supply dumps, and hauling water, rations, and ammunition to the me fighting in the front lines."<sup>47</sup>

Prior to the creation of depot companies, the Marine Corps was depending on replacement infantry battalions (reinforcements or relief) to move the supplies from the beaches inland during amphibious assaults. Utilizing combat units for unloading such material was not the preferred way to conduct an assault. According to 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, there was a desperate need for at least 100 men per vessel to offload cargo during ship to shore operations.<sup>48</sup> This and the need for personnel with "special logistical skill" led the Division of Plans and Policies to create depot companies and ammunition companies utilizing African American Marines; the top leadership however, remained Caucasian. A significant number of these companies were

part of shore parties attached to divisional assault units. The companies "often worked under enemy fire and on occasion joined in the battle as they moved supplies, evacuated the wounded, and secured the operations supply dumps."<sup>49</sup> Almost 8,000 African American males, or about 40% of the Marine Corps' black Marines, served in this necessary, but extremely dangerous, combat duty.<sup>50</sup> A side benefit to the Marine Corps at the time was that these companies could absorb the rapidly growing number of black draftees.<sup>51</sup>

In combat, depot companies assisted in ship to shore movement of supplies and equipment crucial to sustain operations. Once supplies and equipment were ashore, these units stockpiled, sorted, shifted, and moved this material forward into the possession of front line units in contact with the enemy. Ammunition companies in combat also assisted in ship to shore movement, but specifically the movement of ammunition from ships to landing craft to inshore dumps and forward. These types of companies would manhandle ammunition by unloading, sorting, stacking, and guarding it. They were also responsible for moving appropriate ammunition forward to firing batteries and front line troops.<sup>52</sup>

Ammunition companies and depot companies were small, and could be formed and trained rapidly. Training varied from a few weeks for depot companies, to a couple of months for ammunition companies, the latter requiring more time due to the more technical nature associated with handling explosives. These organizations were formed and deployed in numbers corresponding to the size of the amphibious force they were supporting.<sup>53</sup>

The 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Depot Company was activated on 8 March 1943 and the 1<sup>st</sup> Ammunition Company on 1 October of the same year.<sup>54</sup> Initially, the Table of Organization (T/O) for a depot company was 3 officers and 110 enlisted personnel; the depot companies quickly proved their value, and in the summer of 1943 the T/O for these companies increased to 4 officers and 162 (including 3 corpsmen) enlisted men via adding a third platoon. The T/O for ammunition

companies remained basically unchanged from initial formation to the end of the war: 8 officers and 251 enlisted personnel.<sup>55</sup>

These units carried rifles and submachine guns. There were no machine guns or mortars assigned to the companies.<sup>56</sup> Ammunition companies, unlike the depot companies, did possess organic vehicles such as jeeps, trucks, and trailers for the purpose of transporting ammunition. The depot companies relied on external transport.<sup>57</sup>

From October 1943 to September 1944, the Marine Corps created one ammunition company and two depot companies every month. On 1 September 1944 the last ammunition company was created. Depot companies continued to be formed until after the end of the war.<sup>58</sup> Ultimately, the Marine Corps created 51 depot companies and 12 ammunition companies to support amphibious operations in the Pacific. In June 1944, the first of these African American units saw their first real combat.<sup>59</sup> (see Appendix F)

### **Battles Supported by the Ammunition and Depot Companies**

#### **Saipan**

At Saipan, the 19<sup>th</sup> Depot Company was attached to 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division. The 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Depot Companies landed with 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division at Saipan on D-Day, 15 June 1944. Depot Companies began to arrive at their assigned beaches as soon as one and a half hours after the first wave landed. African American Marines saw action as they fought as infantry to reinforce a thinly held line approximately 100 meters from the water's edge, manhandled vast amounts of cargo from ships' holds onto landing craft, established supply dumps, distributed supplies to combat units, and helped eliminate Japanese infiltrators between adjacent unit boundaries.<sup>60</sup>

The 18<sup>th</sup> Depot Company, while standing in waist deep surf, unloaded boats and brought in vital supplies such as food and water. They provided security and loaded casualties aboard

boats bound for hospital ships off shore. They also rode guard on trucks carrying fuel from the beach to inland units.<sup>61</sup>

When the 20<sup>th</sup> landed, according to the Company Commander Captain William C. Adams, "All hell was breaking when we came in. It was touch and go when we hit shore, and it took some time to establish a foothold." Private Kenneth J. Tibbs, Captain Adams' orderly, died of wounds sustained that day and became the first African American killed in combat during the war.<sup>62</sup>

Also during the D-Day landings at Saipan, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Ammunition Company moved ammunition from ships to landing craft and worked on board the pontoon barges where they transferred ammunition to DUKW (amphibious trucks) or LVT amphibian tractors to move ashore. Portions of this company took part in the assault, embarked on landing craft, and helping to establish a beachhead under intense enemy fire. Sergeant Ernest W. Coney, quoted in Bernard C. Nalty's book entitled *The Right to Fight: African American Marines in World War II*, stated, "One team had an amphibious tractor shot out from under it as it was being unloaded."<sup>63</sup> Once the beachhead was established, the Marines of 3<sup>rd</sup> Ammunition Company helped defeat a night Japanese counter attack.<sup>64</sup>

When word of the accomplishments of these support companies reached the Commandant, Lieutenant General Alexander A. Vandegrift, he declared: "The Negro Marines are no longer on trial. They are Marines, period." And a war correspondent for Time wrote, "The Negro Marines, under fire for the first time, have rated a universal 4.0 on Saipan." According to the Naval proficiency rating at the time, there could be no higher mark.<sup>65</sup>

### Tinian

Marines from the ammunition and depot companies who had seen action in Saipan soon embarked aboard landing craft there and proceeded to Tinian. This island lies in close

proximity of Saipan and was assaulted during the last week of July in 1944. Elements of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ammunition Company accompanied the assault troops and depot companies provided the usual support by unloading essential supplies.<sup>66</sup>

### Guam

The first World War II battle for Guam occurred on 10 December 1941 when Japanese forces overwhelmed this almost defenseless possession of the United States. On 21 July 1944 Marines and Army troops landed on the island to recapture it from the Japanese. Three platoons of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ammunition Company directly supported 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division on the northern beaches during the amphibious assault. Meanwhile, the 4<sup>th</sup> Ammunition Company, reinforced by the remainder of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ammunition Company, were in direct support of the 1<sup>st</sup> Provisional Marine Brigade in the southern beachhead. In the north, the platoons of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ammunition Company supported the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division as the Japanese laid down intense fire from elevated positions overlooking the invasion site. In the south, the elements of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Ammunition Companies established the brigade ammunition dump, and then dug in to protect it. The enemy attempted to blow it up, under the cover of darkness, but the African American Marines killed the enemy personnel who were laden with explosives. The ammunition and depot companies supported the assault at Guam until the island was declared secure on 10 August.<sup>67</sup>

After completion of the operation, the 1<sup>st</sup> Provisional Marine Brigade Commander, Brigadier General Lemuel C. Shepherd Jr. wrote a letter to the 4<sup>th</sup> Company's commander 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Russell S. LaPointe. The letter commended the unit's performance, stating that the ammunition company "...contributed in large measure to the successful and rapid movement of combat supplies in this amphibious operation."<sup>68</sup>

### Peleliu



The African American Marines of the 11<sup>th</sup> Depot Company and the 7<sup>th</sup> Ammunition Company were present at Peleliu, when the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division made its amphibious assault on 15 September 1944. Marines from both companies had casualties, but the Marines of the 11<sup>th</sup> paid a heavy price with 17 men wounded; this was the highest casualty rate African American companies sustained during the war.<sup>69</sup> Major General William H. Rupertus, Commanding General of 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, sent letters of commendation to the commanders of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> companies praising them and their African American Marines.<sup>70</sup> The letters written while "close combat was raging" said, "The performance of duty of the officers and men of your command has, throughout the landing on Peleliu and the assault phase, been such as to warrant the highest praise. Unit commanders have repeatedly brought to my attention the whole-hearted cooperation and untiring efforts exhibited by each individual..."<sup>71</sup>

#### Iwo Jima

The 33<sup>rd</sup>, 34<sup>th</sup>, and 36<sup>th</sup> Depot Companies along with the 8<sup>th</sup> Ammunition Company were present at Iwo Jima as part of the V Amphibious Corps. On D-Day, 19 February 1945 elements of these companies landed with the assault force, and over the following three days all the elements of the four companies were ashore.<sup>72</sup> During that time, the men of the ammunition and depot companies struggled in the black volcanic sand beaches under almost constant enemy indirect fire unloading landing craft.

At the ammunition dump operated by the 8<sup>th</sup> Company, the Marines battled fires started from Japanese mortars by shoveling sand on the flames. On one occasion an enemy indirect fire attack struck the dump detonating a bunker containing high explosives and white-prosperous shells, which in turn started several additional fires throughout the dump. Members of the 8<sup>th</sup> Ammunition Company were forced to evacuate, but eventually returned to extinguish the flames and salvage as much of the ammunition as they could. Later this same

unit braved enemy sniper fire to retrieve an emergency load of ammunition that was dropped by parachute to replace what the fires destroyed.<sup>73</sup>

On 26 March, Japanese personnel slipped past the Marine infantry, who had the enemy pinned down near the northernmost airfield on Iwo Jima. With 200-300 well-armed personnel, the Japanese launched a full-scale attack on U.S. troops camped near the western beaches. Intense fighting occurred near the rear area where the 8<sup>th</sup> Ammunition and the 36<sup>th</sup> Depot Companies were staged. U.S. forces included African American units who engaged the enemy and eventually defeated the raid. According to Gene Doughty, a Montford Point Marine who was present on Iwo Jima during the assault phase, the Marines of the 8<sup>th</sup> Ammunition Company, "made some major contributions in the fight."<sup>74</sup>

### Okinawa

The final battle of World War II at which African American Marines made significant contributions was on Okinawa. On 1 March 1945 approximately 2,000 African American Marines, a greater number than any previous operation, supported III Marine Amphibious Corps in the divided-operations between demonstration and assault forces. There were three ammunition companies and four depot companies assigned to 7<sup>th</sup> Field Depot which supported III Marine Amphibious Corps. African American units involved in the operation were the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> Ammunition Companies, and the 5<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 37<sup>th</sup>, and 38<sup>th</sup> Depot Companies. Within three days, almost all of the African American men assigned to these units were ashore and directly supporting the fight. Over the next two months, the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> Depot Companies arrived to reinforce the 7<sup>th</sup> Field Depot and the units fighting on Okinawa.<sup>75</sup>

The critical contribution of the African American units during the battle for Okinawa was their performance carrying parties. With the advancement of U.S. troops, the supply lines grew longer; then the roads turned into "quagmires" when the seasonal rains began to "fall in

torrential proportions.” Carrying parties consisting of the depot and ammunition companies’ Marines were organized to haul ammunition and supplies forward. These carrying parties also returned to base camps with the wounded to be medically evacuated.<sup>76</sup> On 22 June 1945, the island was declared secured, but the work of these units continued as the Marines prepared to invade mainland Japan. The invasion of the mainland, of course, never occurred because the Japanese surrendered on 15 August 1945, after the dropping of the two atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima.<sup>77</sup> (see Appendix G)

### **Awards**

There were over one million African Americans participating in World War II, but none received the United States’ highest award for valor, the Medal of Honor.<sup>78</sup> It would not be until 50 years after the war, under President Bill Clinton; that a few of these individuals would receive the credit they deserved for their unselfish actions in World War II.<sup>79</sup> Even then, no African American Marine received the Medal of Honor.

However, several awards were given to African American Marines, as well as their units, for their contributions in combat during World War II. Among these awards were the following: The Navy Unit Commendation awarded to 1<sup>st</sup> Provisional Marine Brigade, to include the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Ammunition Company and the attached Platoon from 2<sup>nd</sup> Depot Company for action on Guam; the Presidential Unit Citation Awarded to the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division, to include the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ammunition Company and the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> Depot Companies on Saipan and Tinian;<sup>80</sup> PFC Luther Woodward, U.S.M.C., was awarded the Bronze Star (later upgraded to a Silver Star) for his bravery, initiative, and battle-cunning on Guam;<sup>81</sup> Privates James M. Whitlock and James Davis “earned the Bronze Star for Heroic achievement” on Iwo Jima;<sup>82</sup> in addition to these, numerous purple hearts (some posthumously) were awarded to African American Marines who served in World War II.

## **Conclusion**

Although African American Marines were discriminated against during World War II by being segregated from the preponderance of Marine forces, these warriors bravely defended the United States of America and brought credit to both the Corps and the African American population. The contributions these Marines made during that conflict in the Pacific Theater were numerous.

The 51<sup>st</sup> and 52<sup>nd</sup> Defense Battalions role of guarding U.S. assets and personnel in the Pacific did not seem significant to winning battles on various islands during offensive operations, however, this duty was important in supporting the war effort as a whole. By maintaining those positions in the Ellice Islands, the Marshall Islands, Guam, Eniwetok, and Kwajalein, these two units not only freed up other Marine units to carry out other missions, but they provided a necessary deterrent to the Japanese who would have surely attacked these assets if they were not defended. Also, the 52<sup>nd</sup> Defense Battalion's patrols and ambushes helped ensure the surviving Japanese soldiers abandoned on Guam were kept off balance and unable to mass strength for any significant attacks on Allied personnel.

The more significant contributions, however, came from the Marine depot and ammunition companies. The need for "specially trained personnel" to perform the duty of physical logistics, or manhandling, sorting, building/defending supply dumps, and delivering essential supplies such as food, water, and ammunition to the front line Marines engaged with the enemy was crucial to winning the battles on Saipan, Tinian, Guam, Peleliu, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa. Without these companies of African American Marines, the Corps may not have obtained each victory as they did on the before mentioned islands because the forward units would have had to use their assets for the critical logistical support items. Like all Marines, they performed their assigned duty and helped achieve victory in the Pacific.

### **The Clint Eastwood/Spike Lee Debate**

As for the Clint Eastwood and Spike Lee debate, both directors are correct. Spike Lee is correct in saying that Black servicemen were on Iwo Jima and contributed to the fight. Clint Eastwood is also correct in saying that the portion of the war upon which he concentrated (the flag raising on Mount Suribachi) did not have any African Americans associated with it. Spike Lee was wrong, however, in one very important detail. Lee commented that Eastwood's films did not show one African American on the screen. This statement is incorrect. In fact, there were African American Marines shown aboard a Navy transport prior to going ashore on Iwo Jima in the film "Flags of Our Fathers." Perhaps Spike Lee should have watched the movie more closely before making his accusation toward Clint Eastwood? And perhaps there is a film to be made, based upon PFC Luther Woodward, who indeed received the Silver Star for valor in combat against the enemy. That is the film Spike Lee should consider making.

## End Notes

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Richard O. Hope, *Racial Strife in the U.S. Military: Toward the Elimination of Discrimination* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1979), 24.
- <sup>2</sup> Morris J. MacGregor, Jr., *Integration of the Armed Forces 1949-1965* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1981), 103.
- <sup>3</sup> Hope, *Racial Strife in the U.S. Military*, 24.
- <sup>4</sup> Bernard C. Nalty, *Strength For the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military* (New York: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1986), 201.
- <sup>5</sup> Bernard C. Nalty, *The Right to Fight: African-American Marines in World War II* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1995), 2.
- <sup>6</sup> Alexander Bielakowski, *African American Troops in World War II* (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2007), 5.
- <sup>7</sup> Bielakowski, *African American Troops in World War II*, 27.
- <sup>8</sup> Robert Debs Heinl, Jr., *Soldiers of the Sea: The United States Marine Corps, 1775-1962*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Annapolis: The United States Naval Institute, 1962; Baltimore: The Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company of America, Inc., 1991), 302. Citations are to the Nautical & Aviation edition.
- <sup>9</sup> MacGregor, Jr., *Integration of the Armed Forces 1949-1965*, 99-100.
- <sup>10</sup> Nalty, *The Right to Fight: African-American Marines in World War II*, 1-2.
- <sup>11</sup> Henry I. Shaw Jr. and Ralph W. Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979), 1.
- <sup>12</sup> Nalty, *The Right to Fight*, 2-3.
- <sup>13</sup> Hope, *Racial Strife in the U.S. Military*, 30.
- <sup>14</sup> Ronald K. Culp, *The First Black United States Marines: The Men of Montford Point, 1942-1946* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company Publishers, 2007), 32.
- <sup>15</sup> Nalty, *The Right to Fight*, 2-3.
- <sup>16</sup> Nalty, *The Right to Fight*, 4.
- <sup>17</sup> MacGregor, Jr., *Integration of the Armed Forces 1949-1965*, 101.
- <sup>18</sup> Shaw Jr. and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 2.

- <sup>19</sup> Bielakowski, *African American Troops in World War II*, 46.
- <sup>20</sup> Bielakowski, *African American Troops in World War II*, 45.
- <sup>21</sup> Shaw Jr. and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 3.
- <sup>22</sup> MacGregor, Jr., *Integration of the Armed Forces 1949-1965*, 101.
- <sup>23</sup> Shaw Jr. and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 5.
- <sup>24</sup> Shaw Jr. and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 5.
- <sup>25</sup> Larry Smith, *The Few and the Proud: Marine Corps Drill Instructors in Their Own Words* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2006), 185.
- <sup>26</sup> Shaw Jr. and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 5.
- <sup>27</sup> Nalty, *The Right to Fight*, 6.
- <sup>28</sup> Bowen, Elmer N., Personal Papers, Archives and Special Collections Branch, Library of the Marine Corps, Gray Research Center, Quantico, Virginia, Coll. #321858.
- <sup>29</sup> Shaw Jr. and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 8.
- <sup>30</sup> In devising plans for the composite battalion the Director of Plans and Policies rejected a proposal to organize a black raider battalion. The author of the proposal had explained that Negroes would make ideal night raiders "as no camouflage of faces and hands would be necessary." Memo, Col Thomas Gale for Exec Off. Div of Plans and Policies, 19 Feb 42, AO-250, MC files. Quoted in MacGregor, Jr., *Integration of the Armed Forces 1949-1965*, 101.
- <sup>31</sup> Shaw Jr. and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 5.
- <sup>32</sup> MacGregor, Jr., *Integration of the Armed Forces 1949-1965*, 104-107.
- <sup>33</sup> MacGregor, Jr., *Integration of the Armed Forces 1949-1965*, 108.
- <sup>34</sup> LtCol Frank O. Hough, Maj Verle E. Ludwig, and Henry I. Shaw, Jr., *Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal - History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, Vol. I (Washington: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, 1958) pp. 78-83, 223-224. Quoted in Henry I. Shaw Jr. and Ralph W. Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979), 2.
- <sup>35</sup> Nalty, *The Right to Fight*, 11.
- <sup>36</sup> Nalty, *The Right to Fight*, 11.

- <sup>37</sup> Shaw Jr. and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 15.
- <sup>38</sup> Bielakowski, *African American Troops in World War II*, 46.
- <sup>39</sup> Bielakowski, *African American Troops in World War II*, 46-47.
- <sup>40</sup> Shaw Jr. and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 16.
- <sup>41</sup> Bielakowski, *African American Troops in World War II*, 46-47.
- <sup>42</sup> Bielakowski, *African American Troops in World War II*, 47.
- <sup>43</sup> Bielakowski, *African American Troops in World War II*, 47.
- <sup>44</sup> Nalty, *The Right to Fight*, 19.
- <sup>45</sup> Jonathan J. Nash, *African Americans in WWII*. DVD. San Diego: Traditions Military Videos, 1997.
- <sup>46</sup> Culp, *The First Black United States Marines*, 81.
- <sup>47</sup> Culp, *The First Black United States Marines*, 81.
- <sup>48</sup> Culp, *The First Black United States Marines*, 81.
- <sup>49</sup> Shaw and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, pp. 29 – 46. See also, HQMC Div of Public Information, "The Negro Marine, 1942-1945," Ref Br, Hist Div, HQMC. Quoted in MacGregor, *Integration of the Armed Forces: 1940-1965* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1981): 108.
- <sup>50</sup> MacGregor, Jr., *Integration of the Armed Forces 1949-1965*, 108.
- <sup>51</sup> MacGregor, Jr., *Integration of the Armed Forces 1949-1965*, 108.
- <sup>52</sup> Shaw Jr. and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 31.
- <sup>53</sup> Nalty, *The Right to Fight*, 18.
- <sup>54</sup> Bielakowski, *African American Troops in World War II*, 48.
- <sup>55</sup> Culp, *The First Black United States Marines*, 99.
- <sup>56</sup> Nalty, *The Right to Fight*, 19.
- <sup>57</sup> Shaw Jr. and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 31.



<sup>58</sup> Shaw Jr. and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 31.

<sup>59</sup> Bielakowski, *African American Troops in World War II*, 48.

<sup>60</sup> Nalty, *The Right to Fight*, 20.

<sup>61</sup> Nalty, *The Right to Fight*, 20.

<sup>62</sup> Nalty, *The Right to Fight*, 20.

<sup>63</sup> Nalty, *The Right to Fight*, 20-21.

<sup>64</sup> Nalty, *The Right to Fight*, 20.

<sup>65</sup> Shaw Jr. and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 35.

<sup>66</sup> Shaw Jr. and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 31.

<sup>67</sup> Nalty, *The Right to Fight*, 22.

<sup>68</sup> Shaw Jr. and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 36.

<sup>69</sup> Bielakowski, *African American Troops in World War II*, 49.

<sup>70</sup> Nalty, *The Right to Fight*, 22.

<sup>71</sup> Copies of citations filed with card files for 7<sup>th</sup> Ammunition Company and 11<sup>th</sup> Depot Company (RefSec, Hist&MusDiv, HQMC): 89. Quoted in Shaw and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 37.

<sup>72</sup> Nalty, *The Right to Fight*, 23-24.

<sup>73</sup> Nalty, *The Right to Fight*, 24.

<sup>74</sup> Smith, *The Few and the Proud*, 184.

<sup>75</sup> Nalty, *The Right to Fight*, 24.

<sup>76</sup> Shaw Jr. and Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps*, 41.

<sup>77</sup> Nalty, *The Right to Fight*, 24.

<sup>78</sup> Hope, *Racial Strife in the U.S. Military*, 25.

<sup>79</sup> Nash, *African Americans in WWII*. DVD.

<sup>80</sup> Nalty, *The Right to Fight*, 22.

<sup>81</sup> Bielakowski, *African American Troops in World War II*, 47.

<sup>82</sup> Nalty, *The Right to Fight*, 24.

### *Bibliography*

- Bielakowski, Alexander. *African American Troops in World War II*. New York: Osprey Publishing, 2007.
- Bowen, Elmer N., Personal Papers Collection #321858, Archives and Special Collections Branch, Library of the Marine Corps, Alfred M. Gray Research Center, Quantico Virginia.
- Culp, Ronald. *The First Black United States Marines: The Men of Montford Point, 1942-1946*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company Publishers, 2007.
- Heinl, Robert D. *Soldiers of the Sea: The United States Marine Corps, 1775-1962*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Annapolis: The United States Naval Institute, 1962), 302. Reprinted with forward by A. M. Gray, Commandant of the Marine Corps. Baltimore: The Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company of America, Inc., 1991.
- Hope, Richard O. *Racial Strife in the U.S. Military: Toward the Elimination of Discrimination*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1979.
- MacGregor, Morris J. *Integration of the Armed Forces, 1940-1965*. Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History / United States Army, 1981.
- Nash, Jonathan J. *African Americans in WWII*. DVD. San Diego: Traditions Military Videos, 1997.
- Nalty, Bernard C. *The Right to Fight: African-American Marines in World War II*. Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1995.
- Nalty, Bernard C. *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black American in the Military*. New York: Free Press, 1986.
- Producer, Clint Eastwood, Steven Spielberg, and Robert Lorenz & Director, Clint Eastwood. 2006, *Flags of Our Fathers*. United States: DreamWorks.
- Shaw, Henry I. and Ralph W. Donnelly. *Blacks in the Marine Corps*. Washington D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979.
- Smith, Larry. *The Few and Proud: Marine Corps Drill Instructors in Their Own Words*. New York: Norton & Company, Inc., 2006.
- Warren, James A. *American Spartans: The U.S. Marines: A Combat History from Iwo Jima to Iraq*. New York: Free Press, 2005.

## Appendix A

### CHRONOLOGY

| <u>Date</u>      | <u>Event</u>  |
|------------------|---|
| 1775-1783        | African Americans served with the Continental Marines during the American Revolutionary War   |
| 1798             | African Americans banned from the United States Marine Corps when Navy and the Corps was re-established   |
| 25 June 1941     | President Franklin D. Roosevelt issues Executive Order Number 8802, banning racial discrimination in hiring by defense industries                     |
| 7 December 1941  | United States officially enters World War II  |
| 7 April 1942     | Secretary of the Navy, Frank Knox, advises leaders of the Navy and Marine Corps that they would have to accept African Americans for general service. |
| 25 May 1942      | Commandant of the Marine Corps, Lieutenant General Thomas Holcomb, issues formal instructions to begin recruiting qualified African Americans         |
| 18 August 1942   | Headquarter & Service Battery of the 51 <sup>st</sup> Composite Defense Battalion activated at Montford Point, N.C.                                   |
| 26 August 1942   | First African American Marine Recruits began boot camp training at Montford Point   |
| December 1942    | 51 <sup>st</sup> Composite Defense Battalion formed and First African American Marines began occupational specialty training                          |
| 8 March 1943     | 1 <sup>st</sup> Marine Depot Company activated  |
| 1 October 1943   | 1 <sup>st</sup> Marine Ammunition Company activated   |
| 15 December 1943 | 52 <sup>nd</sup> Defense Battalion organized  |
| 1 January 1943   | Draft System is implemented, mandating that Marine Corps draw 10% of its "drafted" personnel are African American                                     |
| February 1944    | First African American Marines deploy to Pacific Theater for combat service during World War II   |

## Appendix B

The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the SILVER STAR MEDAL to

PRIVATE LUTHER WOODARD,  
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS RESERVE,

for service as set forth in the following

### CITATION:

"For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity while serving with the Fourth Marine Ammunition Company, Fifth Field Depot, Supply Service, Fleet Marine Force, in action against enemy Japanese forces on Guam, Marianas Islands, 11 January 1945. Following freshly-made footprints in the vicinity of the ammunition dump, Private Woodard, voluntarily and unaided, trailed a party of six Japanese through heavy underbrush to a small clearing near an abandoned shack where he opened fire against the enemy, killing one and possibly wounding another before the survivors fired. Returning to his company, Private Woodard organized a patrol of five men and, when contact was again established with the hostile group, was successful in killing one of the two who were annihilated by his group. His initiative and courage in the face of grave peril were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

For the President,

/s/ John L. Sullivan

Secretary of the Navy.

Source: Secretary of the Navy for the President. *Silver Star Award Citation to Private Luther Woodard*. Military Awards Branch, Headquarters USMC, Quantico, Virginia.

## Appendix C

### Colonel Samuel Alexander Woods, Jr., USMC

Colonel Samuel Alexander Woods, Jr. was born on 6 November 1893 in Arlington, South Carolina. After graduation from the Citadel, Charleston, South Carolina, he was appointed a Second Lieutenant in the Marine Corps, on 6 October 1916. Colonel Woods served in various parts of the world including Haiti (1916-1917), Cuba (1917-1918), Santo Domingo (1922-1924), and Newfoundland (1942) as well as at stations in the United States. He also saw duty in France with the 13<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Marines (1918-1919) and in Tientsin and Shanghai, China (1927-1929).

From 1935 to 1938, Colonel Woods served as Force Marine Officer on the USS Indianapolis, and in 1940-1941, he was Director of the Marine Corps Correspondence Schools at Quantico, Virginia. In 1942, he was transferred to the Marine Base, Camp Lejeune, New River, North Carolina where he was Commanding Officer of Montford Point Camp in 1943 and of Camp Lejeune, 1943-1944. His last assignment was with the Marine Detachment, Naval Prison, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where he became Commanding Officer in 1945.

Colonel Woods was placed on the retirement list on 1 October 1946.

Decorations and awards held by Colonel Woods include the Expeditionary Medal with two bronze stars for service in Haiti (1916), Cuba (1917), and the Dominican Republic (1922); the Victory Medal with France Clasp (1918); the Yangtze Service Medal for duty in Shanghai (1927).

Source: Colonel Samuel Alexander Woods file, Collection #127-N-9511, Marine Corps University, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, Virginia.

## Appendix D

### Sergeant Major Gilbert Johnson, USMC (Deceased)

Sergeant Major Gilbert "Hashmark" Johnson, one of the first African-Americans to enlist in the Marine Corps, died of a heart attack on 5 August 1972 in Jacksonville, North Carolina, while addressing an annual meeting of the Montford Point Marine Association.

Born in rural Mount Hebron, Alabama, Johnson attended Stillman College in 1922, aspiring to become a minister. He left college the following year, however, and joined the Army. At the end of his enlistment in October 1929, Johnson was discharged as a corporal. After four years of civilian life, he decided to try the Navy. The Navy accepted Johnson into the Steward's Branch, the only job available to blacks at that time, and he served for nearly 10 years. Johnson was aboard the USS Wyoming during the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941.

The following year, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered the integration of the armed forces, Johnson requested transfer from the Navy to the Marine Corps. He went on to serve the last 17 of his 32-year military career in the Marine Corps. Throughout his Marine Corps career Johnson provided leadership to his younger and less experienced comrades. It was at Montford Point he was given the name "Hashmark," because of his age and many years of service.

In 1943, he was among the first black men to be trained as Marine drill instructors. He also served as field sergeant in charge of all recruit training at Montford Point. As a member of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Defense Battalion on Guam in World War II, "Hashmark" asked that black Marines be assigned to combat patrols from which they were currently exempt. Once approved, he personally led 25 combat patrols.

Johnson later served in Korea with the 1<sup>st</sup> Shore Party Battalion, then later with 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Marines, and finally as administrative advisor at the Headquarters of the Korean Marine Corps. Asked if he experienced any problems as a senior black NCO serving in predominantly white units, Johnson characteristically said, "I didn't encounter any difficulty. I accepted each individual for what he was and apparently they accepted me for what I was."

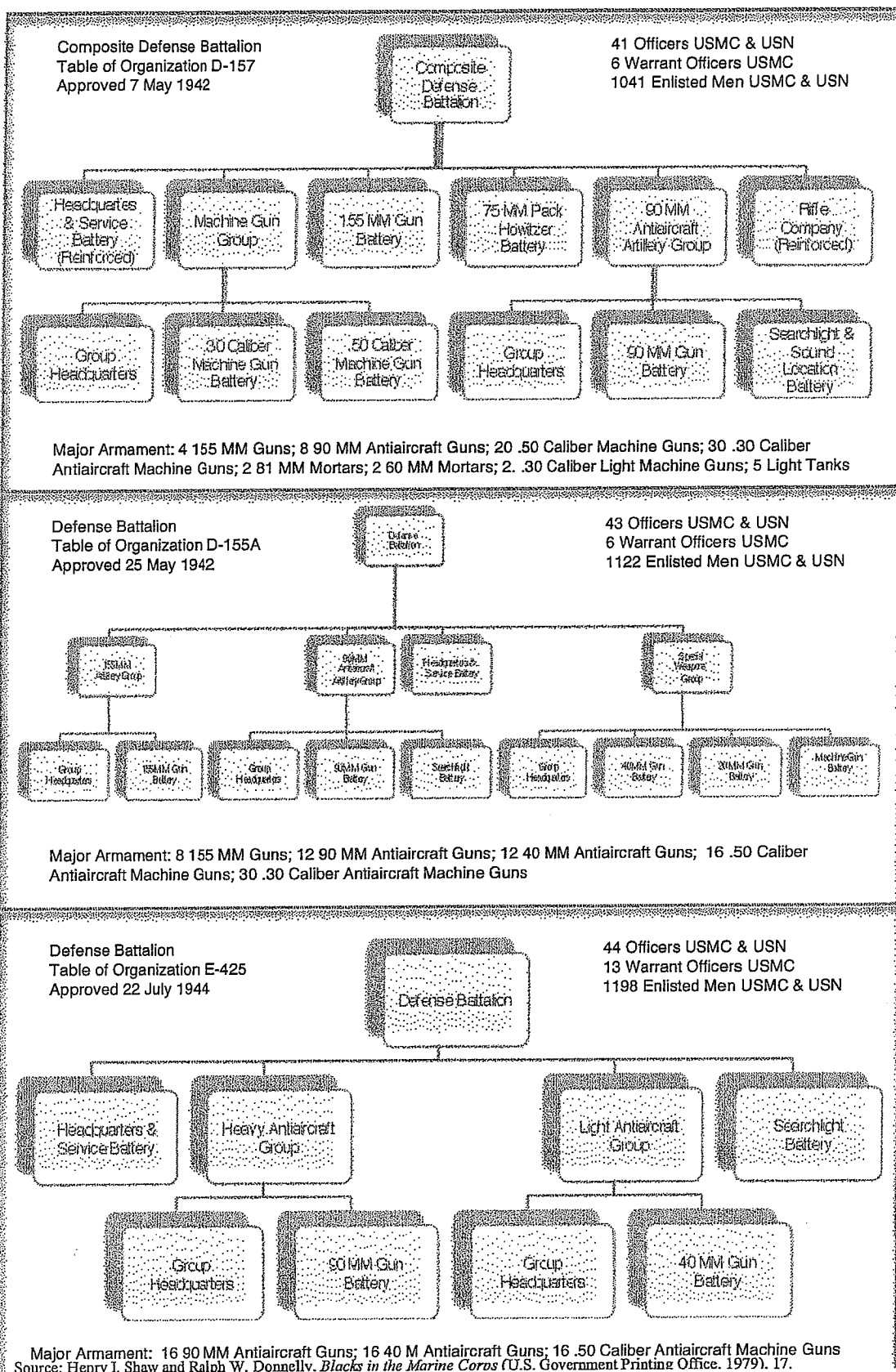
Johnson went on to become one of the first black sergeants in the Marine Corps. Sergeant Major Johnson transferred to the Fleet Marine Force Reserve in 1957 and retired in 1959.

On 19 April 1974, the Montford Point facility at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, was dedicated as Camp Gilbert H. Johnson, Montford Point, Camp Lejeune, in honor of this outstanding Marine.

Source: Sergeant Major Gilbert Johnson file, Marine Corps University, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, Virginia.

## Appendix E

### Defense Battalions 1942-1946





## Appendix F

### African American Marine Units, World War II

| Dates of Activation | Unit Designation          |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| 18 Aug 1942         | 51st Composite Def Bn     |
| 8 Mar 1943          | 1st Marine Depot Co       |
| 23 Apr 1943         | 2d Marine Depot Co        |
| 23 Apr 1943         | 3d Marine Depot Co        |
| 1 June 1943         | 4th Marine Depot Co       |
| 8 Jul 1943          | 5th Marine Depot Co       |
| 8 Jul 1943          | 6th Marine Depot Co       |
| 16 Aug 1943         | 7th Marine Depot Co       |
| 16 Aug 1943         | 8th Marine Depot Co       |
| 15 Sep 1943         | 9th Marine Depot Co       |
| 15 Sep 1943         | 10th Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 Oct 1943          | 1st Marine Ammunition Co  |
| 7 Oct 1943          | 11th Marine Depot Co      |
| 7 Oct 1943          | 12th Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 Nov 1943          | 13th Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 Nov 1943          | 14th Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 Nov 1943          | 2d Marine Ammunition Co   |
| 1 Dec 1943          | 15th Marine Depot Co      |
| 2 Dec 1943          | 16th Marine Depot Co      |
| 2 Dec 1943          | 3d Marine Ammunition Co   |
| 15 Dec 1943         | 52d Defense Bn            |
| 1 Jan 1944          | 17th Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 Jan 1944          | 18th Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 Jan 1944          | 4th Marine Ammunition Co  |
| 1 Feb 1944          | 19th Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 Feb 1944          | 20th Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 Feb 1944          | 5th Marine Ammunition Co  |
| 1 Mar 1944          | 21st Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 Mar 1944          | 22d Marine Depot Co       |
| 1 Mar 1944          | 6th Ammunition Co         |
| 1 Apr 1944          | 23d Marine Depot Co       |
| 1 Apr 1944          | 24th Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 Apr 1944          | 7th Marine Ammunition Co  |
| 1 May 1944          | 25th Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 May 1944          | 26th Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 May 1944          | 8th Marine Ammunition Co  |
| 1 Jun 1944          | 27th Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 Jun 1944          | 28th Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 Jun 1944          | 9th Marine Ammunition Co  |
| 1 Jul 1944          | 29th Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 Jul 1944          | 30th Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 Jul 1944          | 10th Marine Ammunition Co |
| 1 Aug 1944          | 31st Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 Aug 1944          | 32d Marine Depot Co       |
| 1 Aug 1944          | 11th Marine Ammunition Co |
| 1 Sep 1944          | 33d Marine Depot Co       |
| 1 Sep 1944          | 34th Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 Sep 1944          | 12th Marine Ammunition Co |
| 1 Oct 1944          | 35th Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 Oct 1944          | 36th Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 Nov 1944          | 37th Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 Nov 1944          | 38th Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 Nov 1944          | 5th Marine Depot Co       |
| 1 Dec 1944          | 6th Marine Depot Co       |
| 1 Dec 1944          | 39th Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 Dec 1944          | 40th Marine Depot Co      |
| 3 Mar 1945          | 41st Marine Depot Co      |
| 14 Mar 1945         | 42d Marine Depot Co       |
| 14 Mar 1945         | 43d Marine Depot Co       |
| 18 Apr 1945         | 44th Marine Depot Co      |
| 10 Aug 1945         | 45th Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 Oct 1945          | 46th Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 Oct 1945          | 47th Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 Oct 1945          | 48th Marine Depot Co      |
| 1 Oct 1945          | 49th Marine Depot Co      |

Source: Bernard C. Nalty, *The Right to Fight: African American Marines in World War II* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1995), 28.

## Appendix G

### African American Marine Units Involved In Major World War II Operations

| Unit Designation          | Saipan | Tinian | Guam | Peleliu | Iwo Jima | Okinawa |
|---------------------------|--------|--------|------|---------|----------|---------|
| 5th Marine Depot Co       |        |        |      |         |          | X       |
| 9th Marine Depot Co       |        |        |      |         |          | X       |
| 10th Marine Depot Co      |        |        |      |         |          | X       |
| 11th Marine Depot Co      |        |        |      | X       |          |         |
| 18th Marine Depot Co      | X      |        |      |         |          | X       |
| 19th Marine Depot Co      | X      |        |      |         |          | X       |
| 20th Marine Depot Co      | X      |        |      |         |          | X       |
| 33d Marine Depot Co       |        |        |      |         | X        |         |
| 34th Marine Depot Co      |        |        |      |         | X        |         |
| 36th Marine Depot Co      |        |        |      |         | X        |         |
| 37th Marine Depot Co      |        |        |      |         |          | X       |
| 38th Marine Depot Co      |        |        |      |         |          | X       |
| 1st Marine Ammunition Co  |        |        |      |         |          | X       |
| 2d Marine Ammunition Co   |        |        | X    |         |          |         |
| 3d Marine Ammunition Co   | X      | X      |      |         |          | X       |
| 4th Marine Ammunition Co  |        |        | X    |         |          |         |
| 7th Marine Ammunition Co  |        |        |      | X       |          |         |
| 8th Marine Ammunition Co  |        |        |      |         | X        |         |
| 12th Marine Ammunition Co |        |        |      |         |          | X       |

"X" denotes participation in major World War II combat operations.

Sources: Bernard C. Nalty, *The Right to Fight: African American Marines in World War II* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1995), 20-25.

Henry I. Shaw and Ralph W. Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979), 33-41.